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WHEN VOTE-CATCHING AND THE TRUTH ARE WORLDS APART

TEARS AND SMEARS

By ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

Deirdre weeps over slur on mother

LABOUR candidate Deirdre Wood wept yesterday as she recalled how she and her family suffered at the hands of a brutal, alcoholic father.

As her father, who died eight years ago, became the latest ammunition in the vicious campaign against Deirdre in the Greenwich by-election, she said: "I hope the people who are out to destroy me can live with what they are doing."

The bid to smear Deirdre follows personal attacks on Labour's leadership by Edwina Currie, Norman Tebbit and Tory backbenchers.

Deirdre called a Press conference after hearing a Sunday newspaper planned to reveal that her father died a helpless alcoholic in a Salvation Army hostel.

The newspaper had demanded an interview to put allegations that Deirdre and her mother Frances were responsible for kicking her father, Charles Madden out of the family home.

Mother-of-four Deirdre said: "I don't know what this is doing to the campaign, but it's having a catastrophic effect on my family.

"My father was an alcoholic and my mother worked 16 hours a day so she could afford to look after him because he drank away so much money.

"He was often violent. He once threw a boiling tea pot at my ex-husband, who had to go to hospital. He also attacked me when he was drunk. When he was sober he was a nice man but when he was drunk he was a different person.

"My mother eventually felt things were not safe at home in the East End of London and she offered to get him into a private nursing home.

"He didn't want that, so we found him a place in a Salvation Army hostel in Whitechapel.

HE didn't want to see us, but when he needed money we gave it to him. And when he died of cirrhosis of the liver, we gave him a family burial.

"Even now I can't cope with it. It was a terrible period of my life. I can't believe that my mother, who worked hard until she died two years ago, should now be blamed and vilified for something that was not her fault."

Deirdre gave her press conference in the absence of the reporter who had uncovered her father's life story.

Stuart Collier, of the News of the World, arrived at Labour's Campaign HQ yesterday, thinking he was to have an exclusive interview onfirming his "scoop."

But he fled when he found the rest of Fleet Street and the BBC were there and that BBC Newsnight's Vincent Hanna wanted to question him about "dirty tricks" against the Labour candidate.

AS soon as he realised what was happening, Mr Collier ran out, chased down the street by TV cameramen.

Victor Knight writes: This is the latest in an unsavoury mixture of smears, half-truths, intimidation and election bribes, which is wafting a nasty smell from Tory leaders and their Press lackeys.

The reason is that the Conservative Party, in its panic about not being re-elected for a third term, is scared of fighting cleanly on its record when Mrs Thatcher finally makes up her mind about the election date.

Deirdre-weeping

Labour set for easy poll win

LABOUR is on course for a comfortable win in the Greenwich by-election as Tory support crumbles, an opinion poll showed yesterday.

The only threat to Labour's Deirdre Wood is SDP candidate Rosie Barnes.

Boost

The Sunday Times Mori poll gave Labour 46 per cent, with the SDP nine points behind at 37. Tory John Stanley, cliffe, took just 16 per cent.

The boost to Labour's campaign came as SDP leader Dr David Owen predicted the result was "there for the taking," for the Alliance.

Nationally, an Observer/Harris poll put the Tories two points ahead of Labour, with 39 per cent.

Julia Langdon—Page 4

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SUNDAY Mirror Comment

THERE will be plenty to argue about at the next General Election. There is no shortage of issues on which the British people will want to give their verdict.

Before they cast their ballots, they will want to hear how the different parties propose to tackle the continuing scandal of unemployment, the decline of manufacturing, the paralysis of the health service, the crisis in education, the defence of the nation.

They will want those issues to be sensibly, soberly argued out by reasonable, respectable politicians who care more about the future of their country than about temporary party advantage. They will not want to see a bunch of ill-mannered brats thumbing their noses at each other and yelling guttersnipe insults.

The Conservative Party has set out in that direction, but it is not too late for it to change. There are still enough upright men and women in the Tory ranks to bring the hooligan element into line.

Personal abuse is the currency of the bankrupt politician without the honest coin of a sound argument for a sane policy.

If abuse is what the Tories have to offer, the voters will toss it back in their faces on Polling Day.

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